

Webinar: “The Drs. Are In – Where Have All the Men Gone?”

From the webinar promo text:

Sure, an apple a day helps keep the doctor away, but you'll definitely want to hear what the three doctors we have lined up for Wednesday have to say.

That's because – as you know – men are becoming scarce on community college campuses, especially men of color. Family and financial obligations are pushing more men out of college. They face increased college costs while also being lured by higher-paying job opportunities. The doctors from Interact will focus on three significant pain points hampering your efforts to bring men back to your campus: marketing, onboarding and societal forces.

The Interact team of doctors below has the prescription you need to:

- Find, attract and retain male students.
- Create marketing campaigns with a bottom-up perspective.
- Secure access by challenging traditional gender roles.
- Find and plug the leaks in your onboarding funnel.

Resources:

Attached to the agenda you will find the presentation slides, and [linked is the full video](#) in case anyone else wants to watch. You might pick up on something I didn't!

My takeaways:

- Men are skipping or leaving higher education seven times faster than women. 😞
 - Note the word “leaving” – it is a retention/completion problem too.
- Age 25-29 is biggest age group dropping/leaving.
- Marketing messages for a male-focused campaign should be super clear and focus on results. Pitch it as a pragmatic way to improve their life situation.
 - Use numbers.
 - Example: “Hey I’m [Ted the awesome Barton grad]. I finished Barton’s [program?] in [X months/a year] and now I make a living wage doing work I care about.” “Invest in yourself. Go back to school.”
 - After the pandemic, people now see what’s important to them – have to speak that language.
- Focus on combination of **Reality & Humor** in messages.
- Where to market:
 - Find platforms within eSports and gaming. 2/3 in this audience are male. (We can chat up Curtis Rose about where he sees ads in the esports world.)
 - YouTube deserves more attention and marketing resources.
 - For the local audience – get them on campus somehow, and capture their contact info, especially their address and email. Amateur eSports tournaments? (I used to put on LAN parties for people all the time, just for fun!)
- Don't forget about parents!
 - For the traditional student market.
 - And parents might enroll themselves.
- Impersonal “automated” messaging has a negative effect on men.
- We need to know more about our male audience before we do anything or create a strategy. (See slide #20)
 - Where are we losing them? What courses are barriers? Why are *our* male prospective students not attending?
- Make sure our services are simple/easy to access.

- Nudges are everything. Liminal theory/Nudge theory. We need to have well-thought-out communications timed to reach the audience right when they need to take another step.
- Use one-on-one ambassadors to help them through the process. A concierge service of sorts for the enrollment process.
- Positive kudos and acknowledgements for completing steps.
- A process with multiple manual steps is a surefire way to lose male enrollment. (Oof.)
- More on retention:
 - Conduct focus groups – use their language in ads in terms of what was good about attending Barton. Fix the problems and bottlenecks they identify.
 - Audit the language used in our communications. Anything negative should be flipped. (See slides 22 & 23 for examples)
 - A six-week “welcome to college” program connecting male peer students has shown to be an effective strategy for retention.
 - Male mentor programs.
- Do we have men in student services? Admissions?
- **Who is sending what emails/texts to students, and when? (We’re working on this now!! 😊 This is the communication plan/journey maps, etc.!)**
 - “You are spamming them” – one of the presenters. And yes, we are.
 - They feel like they’re getting hit with tennis balls from all directions. Some have rocks in them (bad news from financial aid) and some are lined with cushion (student services).
 - Messaging needs to be SHORT and to the point – “do this next.” “Congrats on finishing that step. Here’s what’s left to do.”
- An audience question generated this nugget of advice:
 - When students get offered a job before they complete a program, that’s sort of bittersweet. It hurts the college in terms of retention/completion if they leave before completing (even though it’s great that they were able to accomplish their goal!)
 - Solution: Communicate with employers about this and why it’s a problem, and maybe set up something that will allow students to finish the program while employed. Maybe design the end of the program so it can be online or evening coursework.

Closing note:

We will be launching a two-phase campaign in July, casting a wide net nationally to find hotspots, then narrowing in on them with targeted campaigns.

We’ll be pushing career technical programs that are offered fully online. Each program will have its own messaging and ads.

We see this as a great opportunity to attract some male students by using the messaging strategies this panel advises, which doesn’t leave out women in the process.

The Drs. Are In



Dr. Pamela Cox Otto

CEO of Interact



Dr. Diane Walleser

VP of Client Strategy and
Outcomes



Dr. Paula Di Dio

Senior Director of
Communications
& Research Strategist

Interact Communications at a Glance

Founded in

1996

Our team is located
throughout the U.S.,
bringing a unique
perspective to our work



25 years

Exclusively in two-year
college marketing and
enrollment

700+

community and technical
college clients

Experts in the diverse
student experience,
from **marketing to
graduation**



In-house,
research-driven team
specializing in CC issues,
politics, and services

interact
2-YEAR COLLEGE EXPERTS



Pamela Cox-Otto
Ph.D.

F2F

250 community colleges on enrollment, retention, and completion



Redwoods

Hartnell

Rio Hondo

community colleges

37 years
working with
community colleges

Ph.D. in
communications



Reporter



KVIQ

KXTV

KCBS

60 Minutes

Faculty

Hamline
Augsburg
Winona State



UofM
St. Johns
St. Bens

**Founder
& CEO**

Where Have All the Men Gone?



Pandemic Hit Male Students Hard

- The decline among men was more than seven times as steep as the decline among women, according to an analysis of figures from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. *Heichinger Report, January 19, 2021*

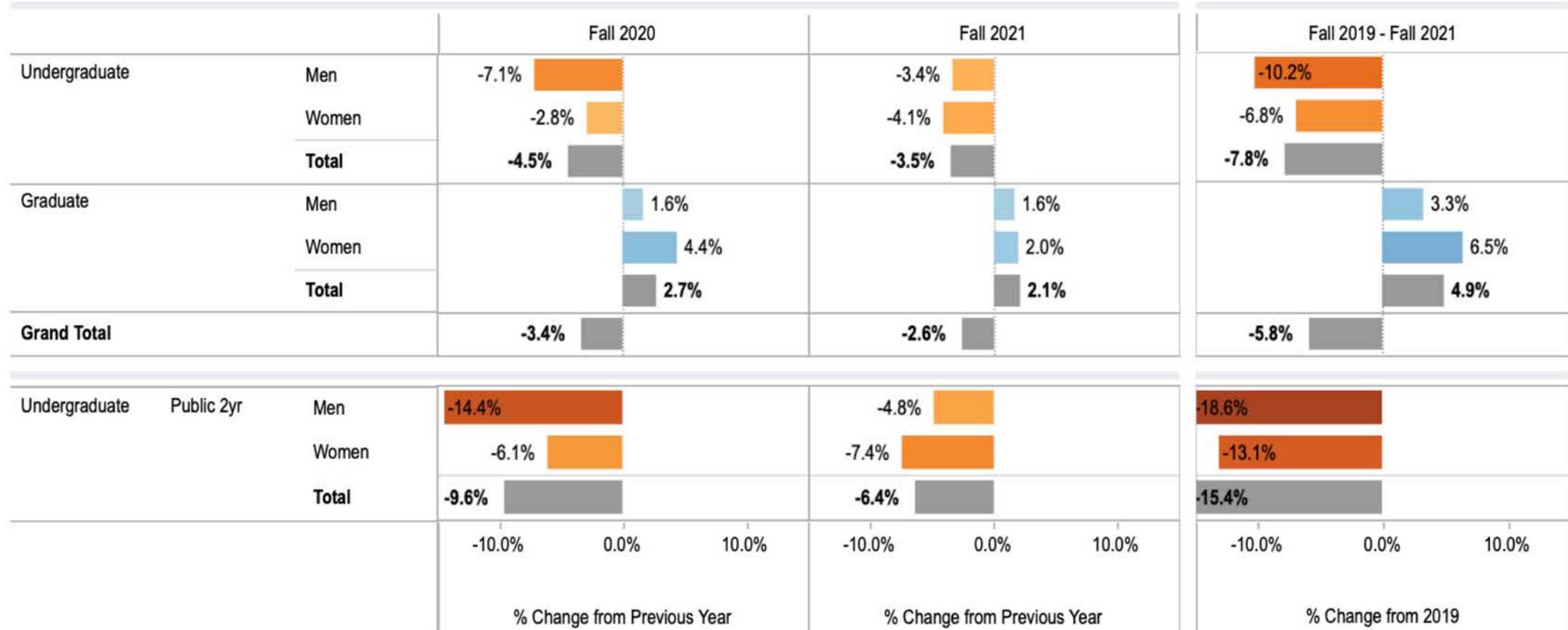
But Male Enrollment Decline Is Not New

- Enrollment rates over the past decade are declining, a change almost entirely driven by men. *Brookings Institute, October 8, 2021*

Unfortunately, Men of Color Are Leaving Faster

- From fall 2019 to fall 2021, Black male community college enrollment declined by nearly 24 percent, and Native American male enrollment at community colleges declined by nearly 26 percent. *New America, January 25, 2022*

Where Have All the Young Men Gone?

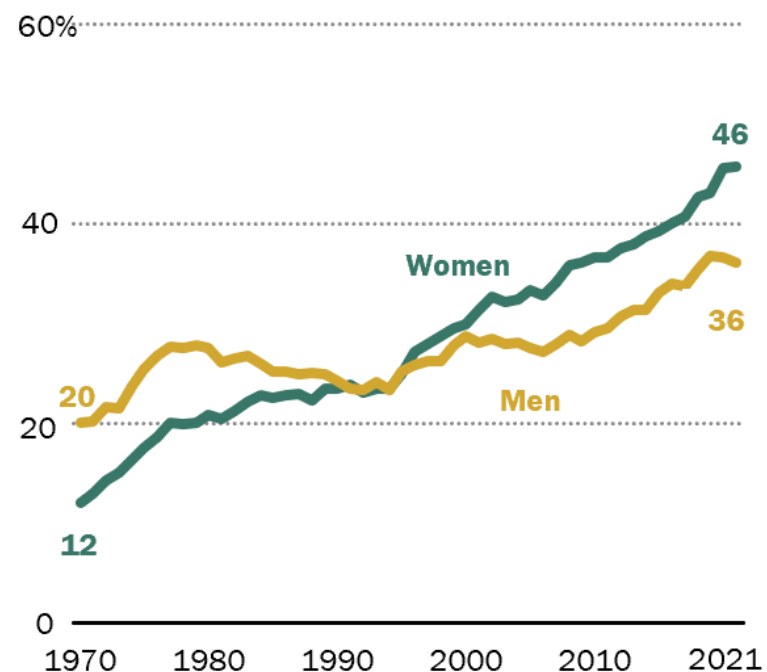
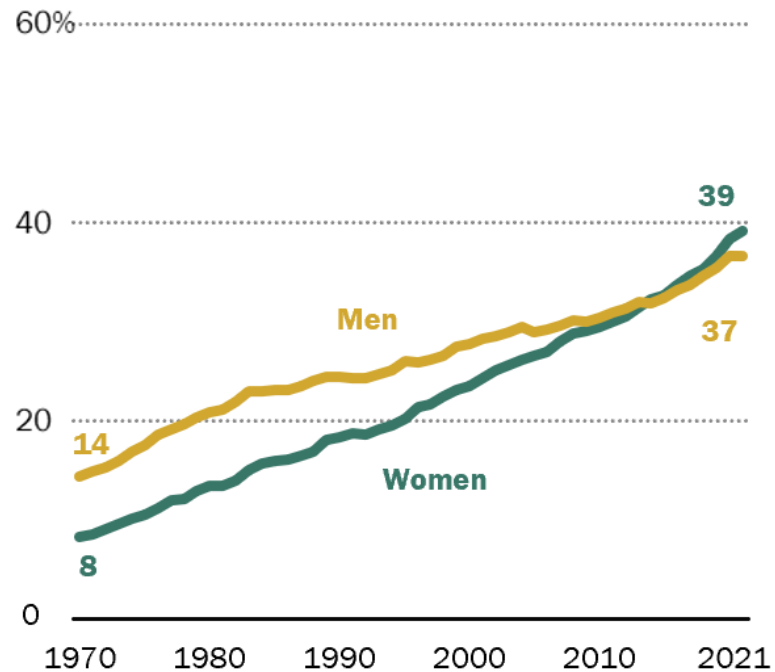


Not Just Ghosting You ... Not Staying Either.

Women in the U.S. are outpacing men in college graduation

% of adults ages 25 and older with a bachelor's degree

% of adults ages 25 to 34 with a bachelor's degree



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (IPUMS).

So Why Are Men Avoiding/Leaving College in Droves?

Pragmatic Reasons

- Hands-on technical programs shut down by the pandemic
- Increased family and financial obligations
- Struggles in virtual learning environments; more hesitant to seek academic help
- Increased college costs
- Lure of higher-paying job opportunities
- Lack of internet or access to technology
- Campus climates and services not tailored to men

So Why Are Men Avoiding/Leaving College in Drove?

Emotional Reasons

- Disbelief in the power of education to provide a better future
- Philosophical factors relating to belief structures (conservative vs. liberal)
- No short- OR medium-term payoffs
- Disbelief in research and science
- Magical thinking ... Person doesn't have a degree and they are a billionaire

What's the Solution?

- **Marketing/Outreach Factors**
 - Me
- **Service/Program Factors**
 - Diane will talk about this
- **Equity Factors**
 - Paula will talk about this

First ... What Are We Doing Wrong?

- Outreach and Marketing not coordinated and in separate silos
- Recruiters are not a match for the recruited
- Little or no peer-to-peer outreach
- Campaign is not targeted (age and ethnicity ... not gender)
- Messaging is not targeted (it's generic)
- Campaigns are not interactive
- Campaigns are up and down (and it takes MUCH LONGER to get a response)
- Media mix is off (if you focus on men at all)

Second, What MUST Be Done?

Marketing

- **Commit to year-round digital outreach with peaks and valleys but ZERO blank times**
 - (Men are slower to make up their minds ... because they are less certain of a beneficial outcome)
- **Men are ALWAYS on the Internet**
 - 61% of men are online every day; 44% of men go online at several (3+) times a day; 89% of men use the internet at home; 65% of men use the internet at work
- **Focus on campaigns that bring REALITY and HUMOR, not dreams and possibilities)**
 - Squishy stuff works ... but slower (work/business are power)

Domains of Power

Power words link to where people feel most powerful

Male Domains of Power



Bonlemoni
z<394.8007
z<10.473
z<4.2026
z<1.9709
01-02

Female Domains of Power



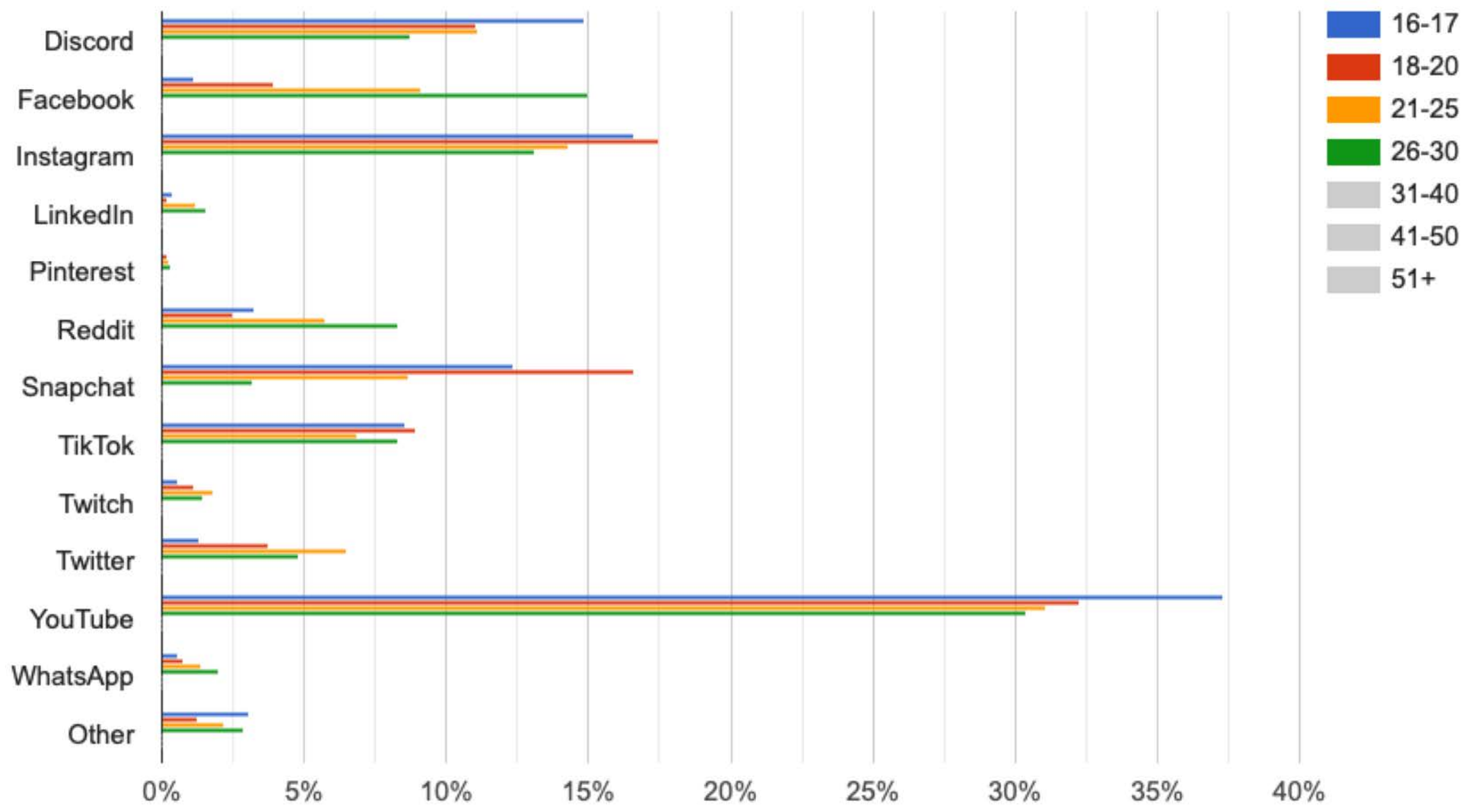
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z<751.0342
z<15.11
z<3.0719
z<1.991
01-02

Second, What MUST Be Done?

Marketing

- **Use power domains and words that matter to them.**
 - Much of college advertising is feminine-focused (quiet feelings, maternal-based around home and family)
- **Men are sensitive to gendered ads ... and are less responsive to ads deemed female ...**
 - So go gender-neutral or go male
- **Where online should you reach men?**

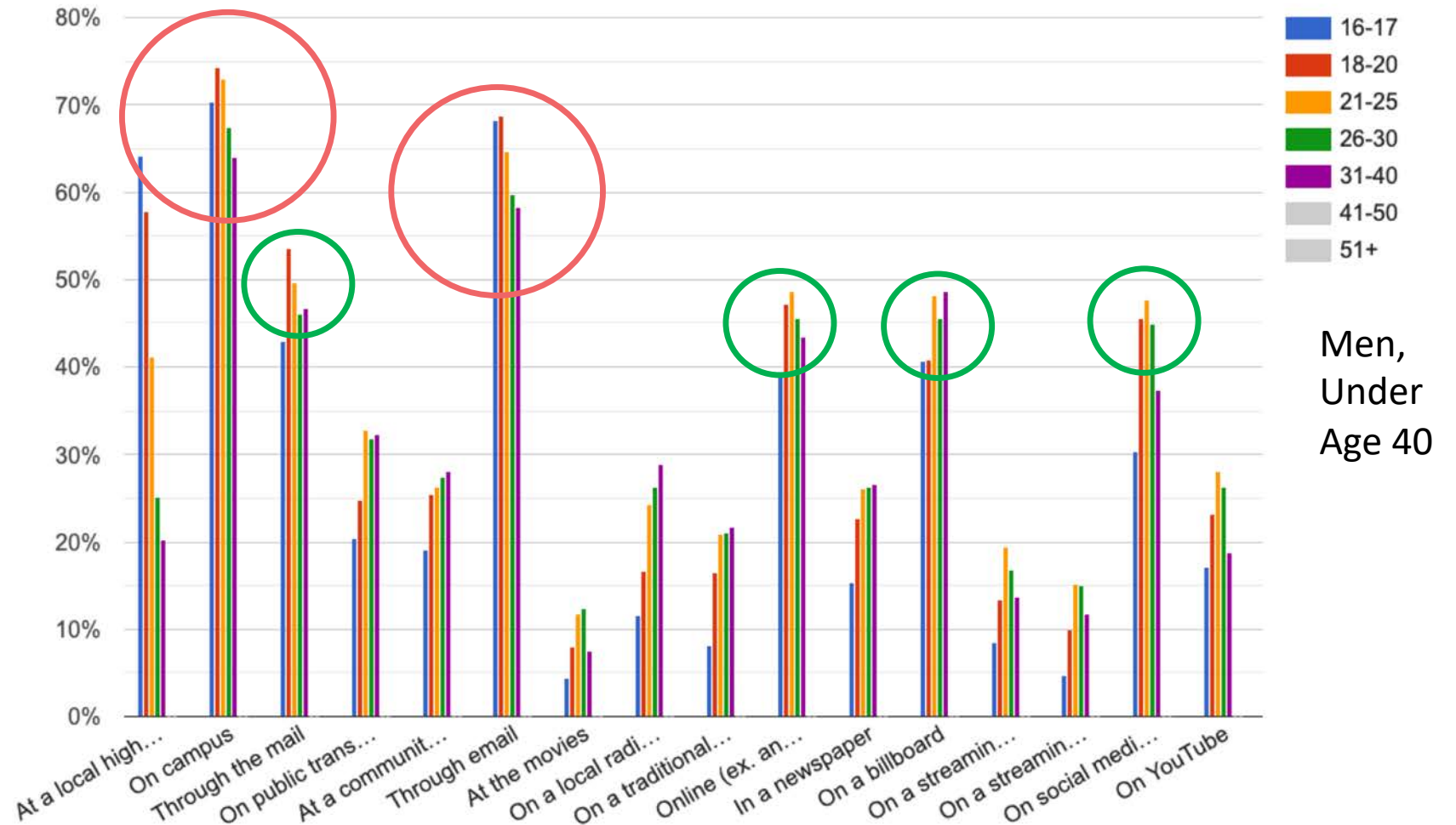
Social Media - What is your favorite social media platform? (Bar View)



What Do They Notice?

MEDIAPREFS

Image and Recruitment - Where have you recently seen or heard an ad for your college?

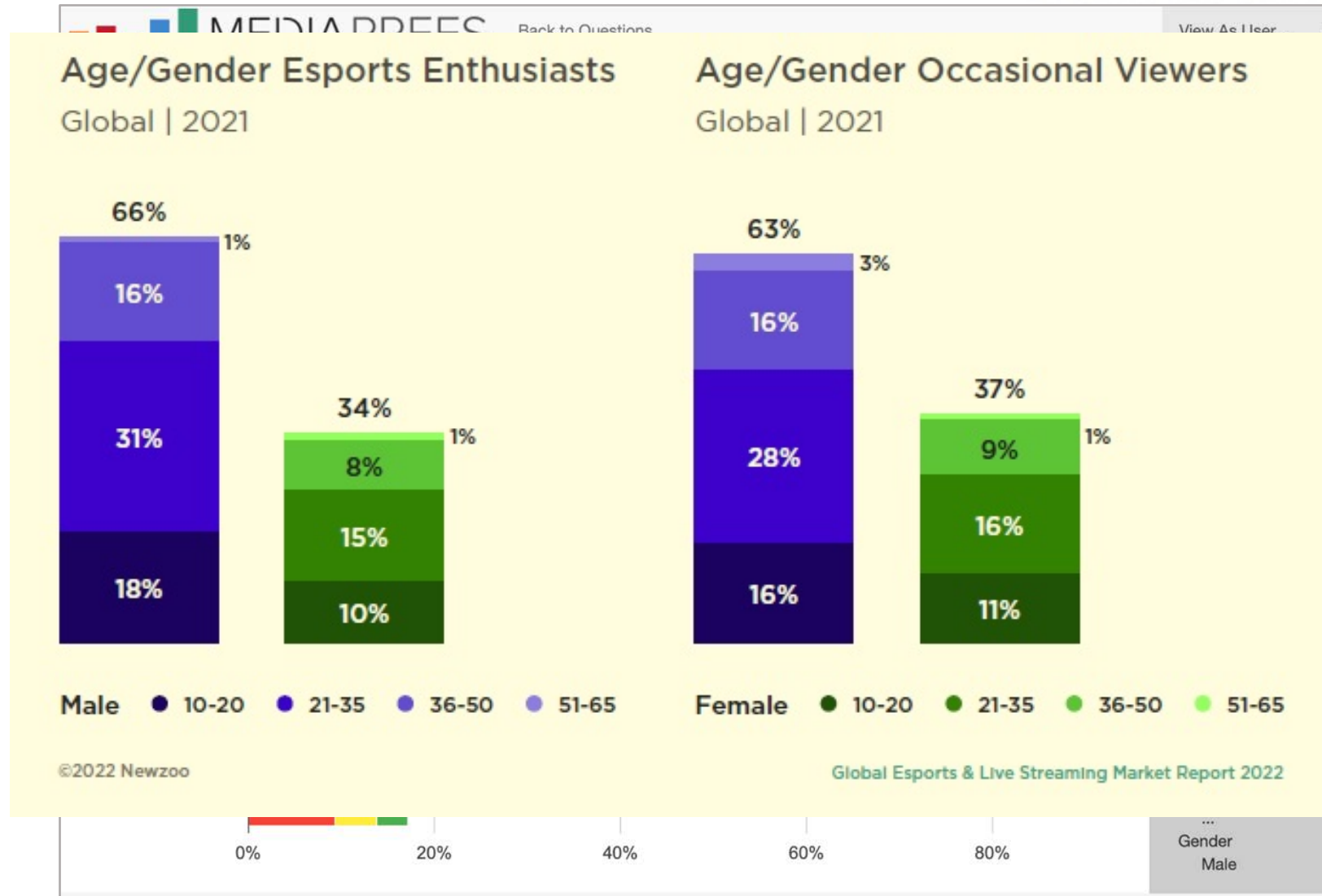


1. Get them on campus
2. Get the names and contact information of EVERYONE who comes on campus
3. Long-term community email campaigns are critical
4. Direct mail, online/social media, and billboards all work at least half the time with males under 40

Three More Things

1. Parents are by FAR the best influencers ...
Plus they need you themselves ...
TWOfer!!!
2. Esports ... Game sites, game teams, game clubs ... :-D
3. Gamers are still men 60/40

***FOCUS ON WHERE THEY ARE AND
MAKE EVERYTHING A TWO-FER***



Service/Program Factors

Dr. Diane Walleser

Challenges



- Low response to surveys
- Reluctant to ask for directions
- Avoid seeking help
- Non-personal automated advising alerts have a stronger negative effect on men than **women** (Community Insights; Civitas Learning; Volume 2, Issue 1 Fall)

Use Data to Identify Pockets of Need

- **Do you know where and when you are losing male students?**
 - Where are they stopping in the onboarding process?
 - What are their enrollment pain points?
 - What courses are barriers?
 - When are you losing them?
 - How many are not converting from application?
 - Do you know why they are not attending?
 - Do you know why they are not returning?

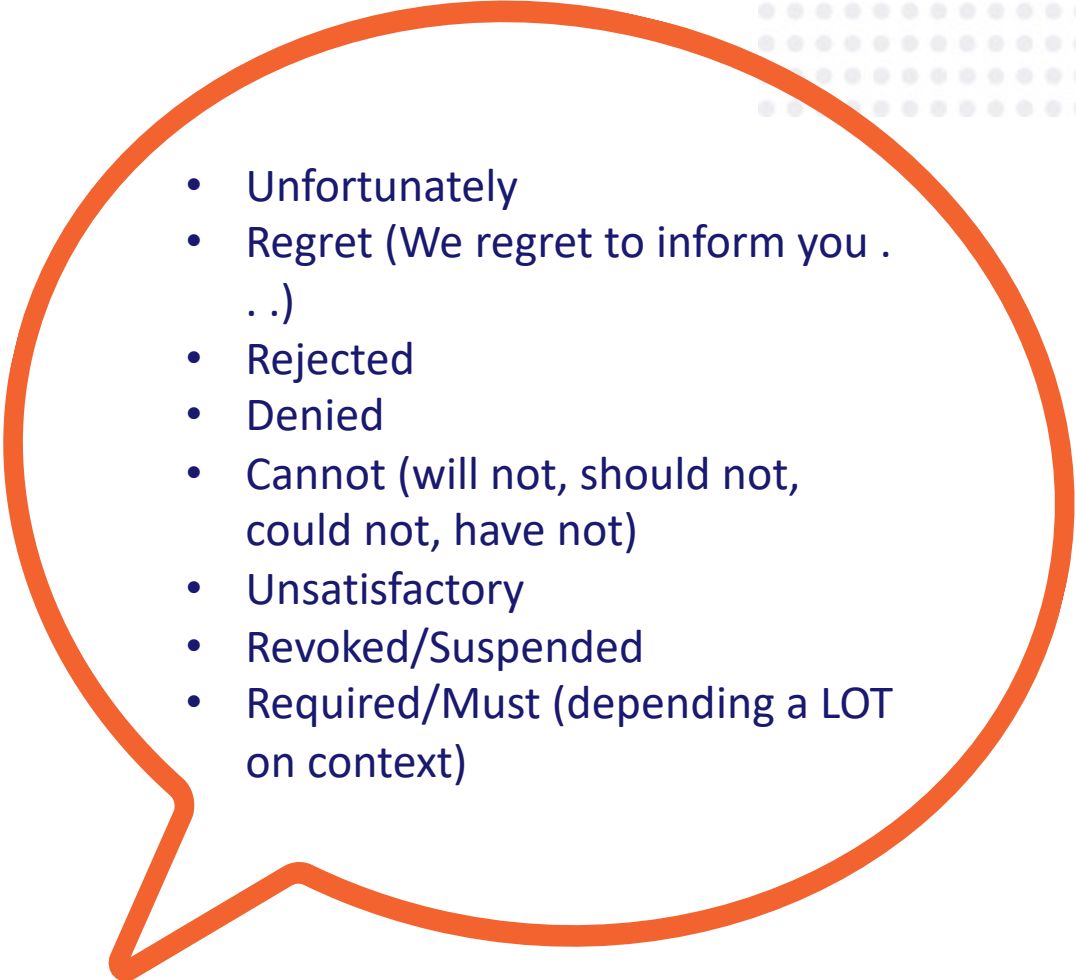
Make It Easy to Ask and Get Help



- One-stop centers
- Chatbot for 24/7
- Peer ambassador connections
- Nudges to keep students on path
- Early alerts to identify students in trouble
- Kudos along the way

Words Matter – Use Them Carefully

- These words (which are very common in our current communications) focus on the recipient's **failure** and the consequences of that **failure** – their **failure** to follow instructions/guidelines, their **failure** to accomplish a goal, and the punitive nature of that particular **failure**.

- 
- Unfortunately
 - Regret (We regret to inform you . . .)
 - Rejected
 - Denied
 - Cannot (will not, should not, could not, have not)
 - Unsatisfactory
 - Revoked/Suspended
 - Required/Must (depending a LOT on context)

Use Welcoming Words

- These words (which are not as common in our current communications) focus on the **recipient's potential for success AND the positive consequences of the process of learning: Sustained effort, planning and strategy, and seeking support/guidance from experts**
- **Potential for success: The power of YET!**
- **Process of learning: Sustained effort, a good strategy, seeking support**
- **When (as opposed to if)**
 - When you learn this, when you accomplish this, when you are in good academic standing
- **Becoming (learning is a process)**
 - We will work together to, we will try another approach to, we may want to consider
- **Guidance/support (as opposed to help/assistance)**
 - Our staff are here to guide you through

Welcome-to-College Program for Your Vulnerable Males



- Six-week peer connection program
- Welcomes students
- Connects them with support programs
- Ideally connect program student with new student



Male Mentor Programs



- “Lunch and learn” sessions with faculty that they can relate to
- Access to a male advisor
- Supplemental instructors that are male
- Connection to cocurricular groups
- Lean on community-based organizations if resources exist

Bringing Them Back

Assistance with financial issues

- Debt forgiveness
- Scholarships
- Debt delay



Reach out from someone who has walked in their shoes

- Hard but worth it
- Reinforce their right to be in college

The Finish Line



- **Celebrate with them**
- **Let them tell their story and be an ambassadors for other males**

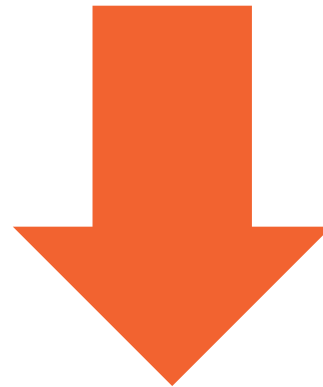
Equity Factors

Dr. Paula Di Dio

Drop in College Enrollment



Fall 2020
-9.4%



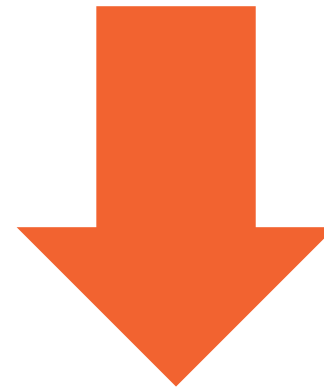
Fall 2021
-6.0%

Male Enrollment



Fall 2020

-14.4%



Fall 2021

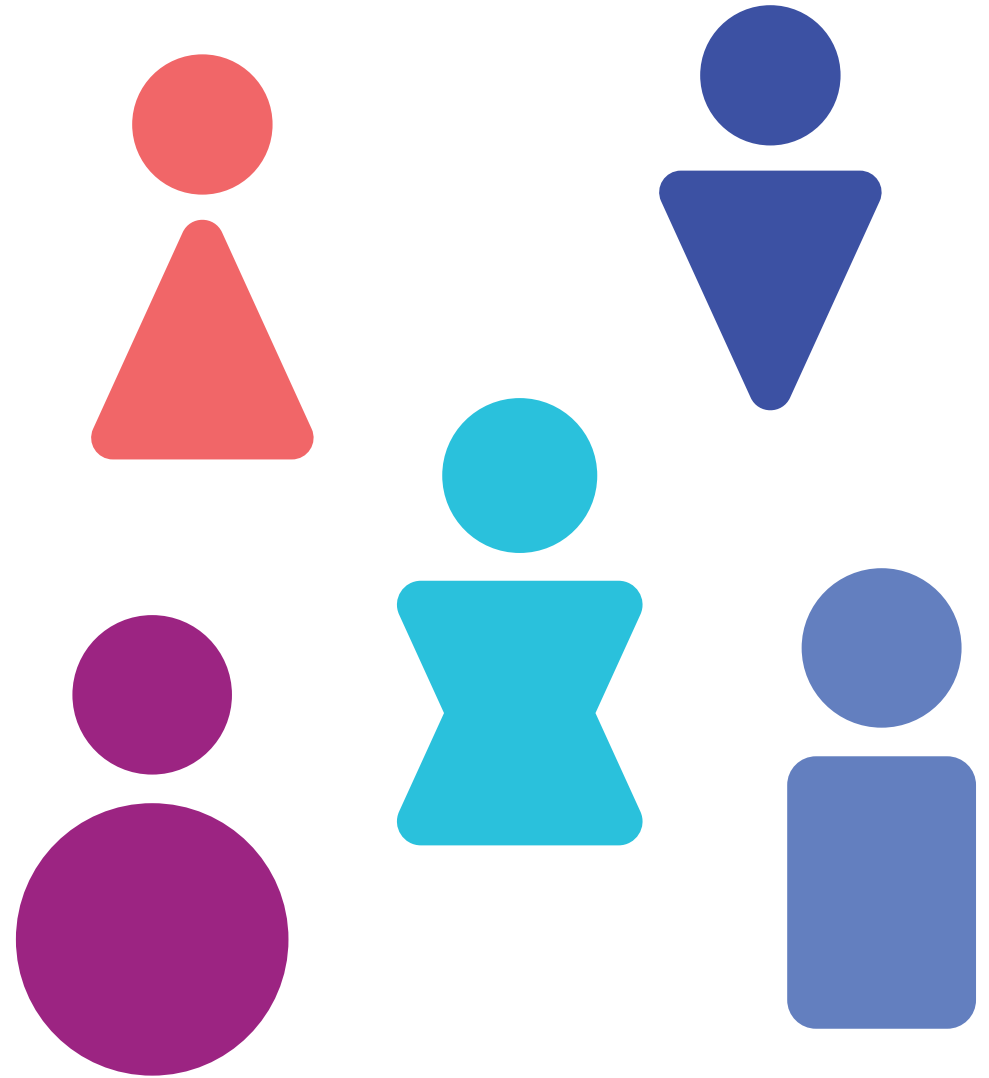
-4.8%

Communities of Color Fall 2020



Rigid Gender Roles

The pandemic has highlighted the rigidity of gender roles in society.



What Are the Forces Behind Enrollment Dips?

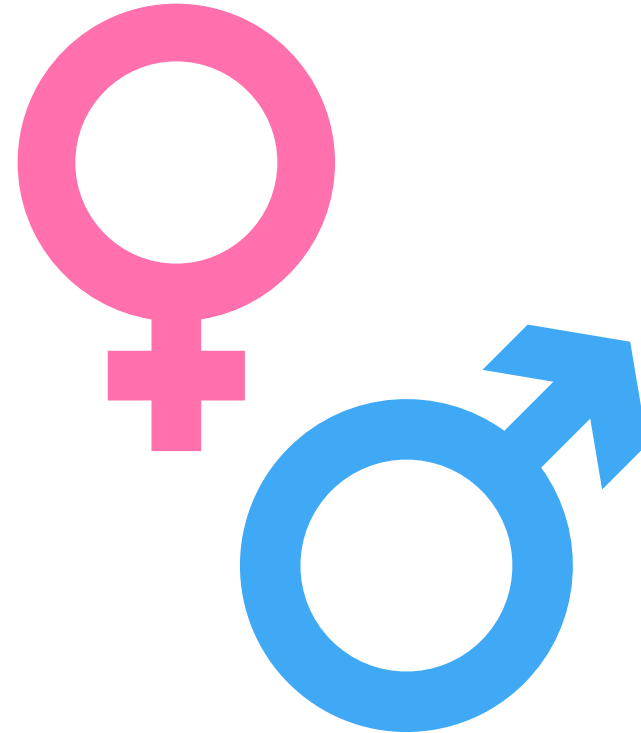
Limiting gender roles influence many people's decisions about investing time and money in a degree.

It's imperative to understand the forces behind enrollment dips.

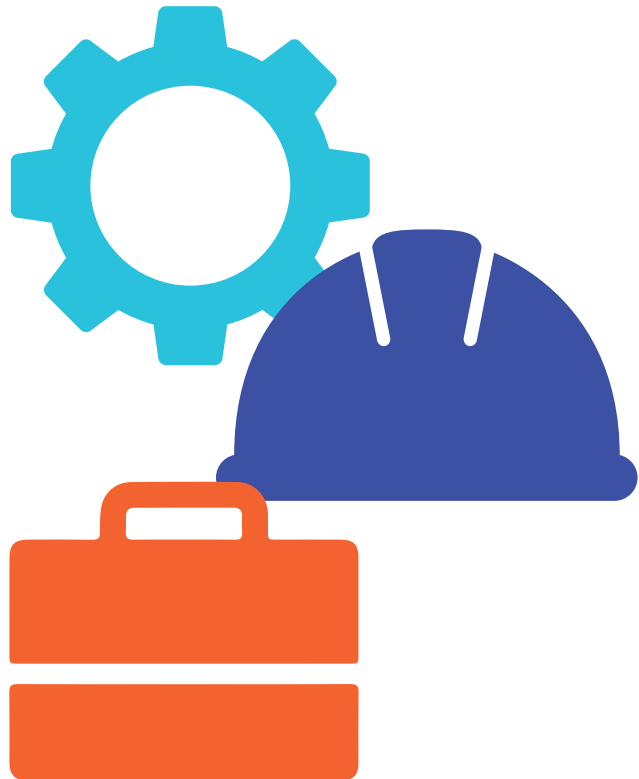
Gender Roles Are Subjective

We tend to think that “gender roles [are] concrete as opposed to subjective states of being.”

Jared Yeates Sexton



Men as Providers



Men between 25 and 29 represent the age group where the greatest decline in enrollment has been observed.

Especially in communities of color, many students have put aside attending college to work overtime and fulfill that traditional role.

Some
Conversations We
Are Not Having

- Vulnerability
- Emotions
- Feelings
- Friendship



Spaces of Belonging



“The need to belong is a powerful, fundamental, and extremely pervasive motivation.”

American Psychological Association

How to Create Change

without creating
resistance and negativity
around
a new way of thinking?



Do Ethnographic Research



“Beliefs rarely stand on their own; they are intertwined with a network of other beliefs and drives.”

Tali Sharot

Think Big, Start Small

Overly ambitious marketing campaigns are sometimes perceived as out of touch with the realities of many communities.

Create agency.



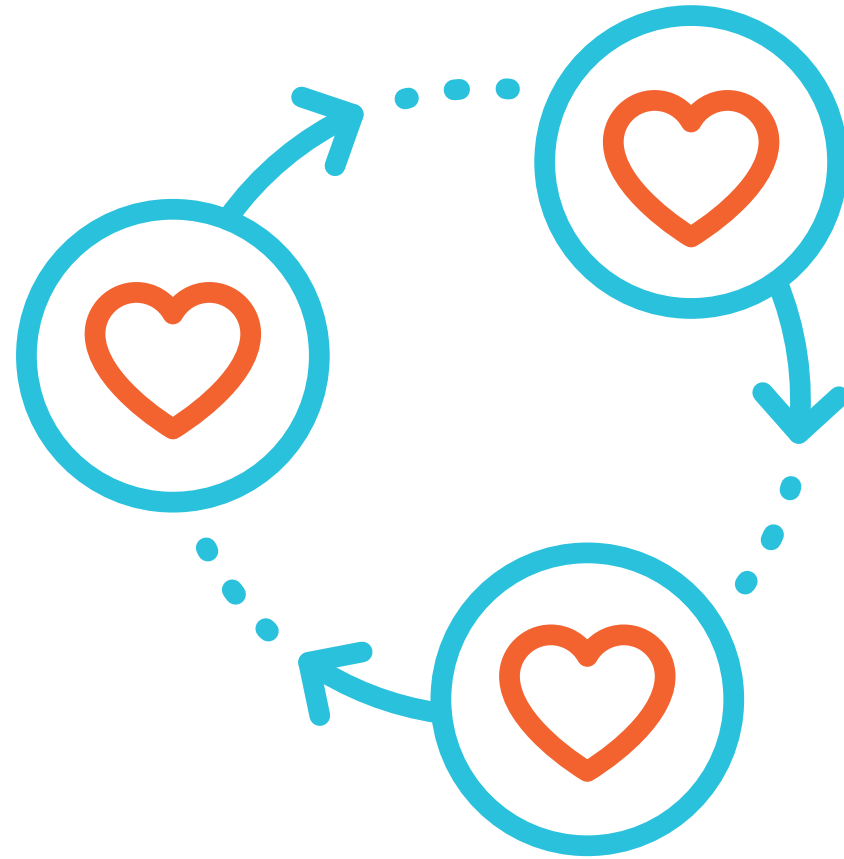
Create Representation



Put a familiar face
on your trailblazing
institution to create trust.

Tolerance and Innovation

When community colleges introduce positive changes, the effects reverberate across their regions.



interact

2-YEAR COLLEGE EXPERTS

2yearexperts.com



Thank You!

Watch for a follow-up email with a survey, today's recording, and a supporting PDF.